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ABSTRACT

The basic collegiate course in speech communication, with its attention to public speaking, can provide experiences which increase international understanding. To widen sources of information, students could be assigned to conduct an interview with a foreign student or professor or a U.S. soldier who has returned from overseas, providing both background and specific information about an international topic such as the Gulf War. Or students could be asked to compare the coverage of a particular event in a U.S. and a foreign newspaper. To increase understanding of speeches by leaders from other countries, students could compare a videotape of the questioning of the British prime minister in Parliament with a press conference held by the President of the United States. Classroom analysis of speeches made by foreign dignitaries to the U.S. Congress could focus on the audience adaptation of the speakers. To improve adaptation to non-U.S. audiences, students could listen to speeches for allusions that are culturally specific. Students could be assigned to prepare a speech in response to that foreign dignitary, to be delivered in the embassy of the dignitary's home country. These assignments do not add additional skills and principles to an already crowded course agenda, but rather add an international dimension to the basic elements of information gathering, audience analysis, oral language use, and appreciative/critical listening. (TD)

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Assignments to Increase International Awareness in the Basic Course

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I heard a story once in the Orient about two architects who went to see the Buddha. They had run out of money on their projects and hoped the Buddha could do something about it. "Well, I'll do what I can," said the Buddha, and he went off to see their work. The first architect was building a bridge, and the Buddha was very impressed. "That's a very good bridge," he said, and he began to pray. Suddenly a great white bull appeared, carrying on its back enough gold to finish construction. "Take it," said the Buddha, "and build even more bridges." And so the first architect went away very happy. The second architect was building a wall, and when the Buddha saw it he was equally impressed. "That's a very good wall," he said solemnly, and began to pray. Suddenly the sacred bull appeared, walked over to the second architect, and sat on him.

from Harold and Maude, Colin Higgins

The basic collegiate course in speech communication, with its attention to public speaking, can provide experiences which increase international understanding. While advanced courses in intercultural communication offer more theoretical depth, they enroll only a fraction of the students who can be reached in the basic course. Moreover, the basic course can offer the initial experiences and insights which may lead more students to later theoretical study.

The assignments in this paper challenge students in the basic course to widen their sources of information, be more perceptive listeners to foreign speakers, and broaden their own perceived audiences.[1] These assignments do not add additional skills and principles to an already crowded course agenda, but rather add an international dimension to the basic elements of information gathering, audience analysis, oral language usage, and appreciative/critical listening. Possibly assignments of this kind can equip students to be architects of bridges instead of walls.

Assignments to Widen Sources of Information

The Gulf War demonstrates the need to widen our sources of information if we are to speak and hear the truth. A student who attempts an objective informative speech or a responsible persuasive speech about the war must first recognize that truth is elusive in times of international conflict--and never more than in this instance. The unprecedented quantity of information provided by television coverage needs to be examined for its quality. The information was censored by both Iraq and the western allies, including the strictest U.S. censorship in modern history. Television and print journalists were often limited to pool reporting, were restricted from direct observation of battles, were prevented from photographing allied casualties, and were often reduced to conveying selected facts disclosed at Pentagon press conferences. At best, the resulting news coverage available to most American viewers and readers reflected a uniformity of information based on limited access. Whatever arguments can be made for restricting information in times of war, subsequent analysis surely requires a search for complete facts. College students who are challenged to find truth in this situation may gain experience which will make them better researchers on other international issues. The following assignments are intended to serve that long-range purpose.

1. Assuming that a speaking assignment is to focus on the Gulf War, students can first be assigned to evaluate and widen their available sources of information. Each student could be assigned to conduct an interview that will provide both background and specific information about the topic. Possible interviewees are: Arab exchange students (Palestinian and Saudi

students are present on many U.S. campuses and may offer differing points of view), Israeli exchange students, faculty members who are natives of the Middle East, returned American soldiers, or returned journalists (even small communities often sent a television or print reporter). The basic questions in these interviews should be: (1) What can you tell me about the war that was not included in the televised or printed news? (2) What is the basis of your information? (3) What are the limits of your personal knowledge? While much of the information gained from these interviews will be subjective, the interviewers may realize how much is not known to the general public, how different are cultural perceptions of the conflict, and how complex are the underlying issues. Preliminary oral reports, shared written reports, or symposium-style discussions based on the interviews could provide an important truth-seeking atmosphere for a subsequent round of speeches ont he war. In a sense, this is "pool reporting" in reverse; the students become reporters who contribute to increased information rather than conduits of the same information.

2. Before preparing a speech on the Gulf War, each student could be asked to compare the coverage of a particular event (possibly the bombing of the command center/civilian bunker in Baghdad) in an American and a foreign newspaper. American newspapers should include a range of editorial stances (e.g., The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Christian Science Monitor, and newspapers from the students' home towns). Depending on the size of the campus library's newspaper collection, the instructor may want to obtain photocopies of news stories through interlibrary loan. Regarding this topic, newspapers from Middle Eastern and neutral countries might be particularly useful sources (e.g., Arab News, Jerusalem Post, and The Times of

India--all published in English). After students have written and distributed brief comparisons, class discussion might begin with the following questions.

a. Which newspapers presented the most complete information?

b. Are there differences in the way some "facts" are presented? Are these differences due to place of publication, intended readership, cultural bias, or other reasons?

c. Are there differences in writing styles that would make quotations from some of the sources stronger than from others?

d. Of all the sources reviewed by class members, which three provide the strongest combination of true and complete information? Would the choice of these three sources differ if the speaker were addressing an audience of foreign students?

e. Should any of the sources be omitted from all speeches about the Gulf War? Why?

The preceding investigation and discussion should heighten students' awareness of foreign news sources and the need to look beyond the cultural and political biases of any one newspaper. Students may then be expected to include at least one foreign news source in speeches about the Gulf War and all subsequent speeches about international issues.

If a library's foreign newspaper collection is limited, the instructor might suggest a subscription to World Press Review.[2] This monthly periodical excerpts, translates, and edits newspaper articles from around the world. Each month, a particular topic is give extensive coverage. For example, the June 1990 issue focused on arms control and included excerpts from The Guardian (London), The Economist (London), Pravda (Moscow), Financial Times (London), and Frankfurter Rundschau (Frankfurt). The May 1990 issue focused on problems in China and included excerpts from Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (Frankfurt), The Observer (London), Financial Times (London), Toronto Star, Far Eastern Economic Review (Hong Kong), Asiaweek (Hong Kong), Beijing Review, and Cambio 16 (Madrid).

Assignments to Increase Understanding of Speeches by Non-Americans

American audiences have frequent opportunities to hear speakers from other countries (particularly with the advent of C-Span on cable television). But availability must be complemented by receptivity from American audiences. The following assignments are intended to encourage appreciative and critical listening to foreign leaders, and simultaneously promote questioning about our own deliberative systems.

1. The videotape "Question Time" may be shown in class along with a video-taped excerpt from any recent news conference help by President Bush.[3] "Question Time" shows British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher being questioned by the opposition in Parliament about her government's policy toward South Africa. This tape was recorded February 13, 1990, during the regular question time which is scheduled every Tuesday and Thursday. One student should be assigned to photocopy and bring to class the coverage of the parliamentary debate as published in The Times (London) the following day; another student should copy and bring to class the coverage of the presidential news conference as it appeared the following day in The New York Times. Both newspapers are widely available on microfilm. The following questions can be raised after students have seen both tapes and read the press coverage.

   a. Under which system of questioning is the leader held most accountable? Is it easier to evade a direct answer in the American system, which allows only one follow-up question per reporter?

   b. Note that the President chooses the reporters to be called on for questions, while the Speaker of the House of Commons selects the questioners (usually including the leader of the opposing party). Which system is more effective in eliciting maximum information from the leader?

c. Does the lack of decorum in the British Parliament (described by Simon Hoggart of the London Observer as a "cross between a presidential debate and a bar fight") weaken the Prime Minister's ability to govern? Or, conversely, is undue deference given to the President by the American press? Under which system is executive power more likely to be abused?

d. Note that the British system separates the Head of State (the Queen) from the Head of Government (the Prime Minister). In the United States, the President fulfills both roles. Does this account in part for the deferential treatment of the President by his questioners?

e. As indicated by newspaper coverage the following day, which method of questioning allows more precise and complete information to be conveyed to the general public?

f. Is it important that question time happens twice a week in the House of Commons, while news conferences are held at the President's pleasure?

Depending on the amount of time available, students could be asked to do follow-up papers or reports analyzing the effectiveness of press conferences during the Watergate and Iran-Contra matters, comparing the role of congressional committee questioning of administrative officials to the questioning in the British Parliament, analyzing Dan Rather's "disrespectful" interview of candidate George Bush in 1988, or speculating on the impact of television coverage recently introduced into the British House of Commons. Simulation and role-playing activities could also be constructed to allow students to experience differences in the American and British systems.

2. A classroom analysis can be done of three recent speeches to joint sessions of Congress: Lech Walesa's 15 November 1989 address, Nelson Mandela's 26 June 1990 address, and Václav Hovel's 21 February 1990 address.[4] After students have read the three speeches, class discussion should focus on the audience adaptation of the three speakers. All three speakers used "Americanisms"--allusions to American history, American heroes, and American

icons. Yet they used them in different ways. Walesa opened with the words "We the people" and repeated the phrase after three sentences; within the first nine paragraphs he mentioned the Statue of Liberty, the Declaration of Independence, the American Constitution, Abraham Lincoln, and twice invoked the lines "government of the people, by the people, for the people." In contrast, Mandela began by reaffirming the possibility of violence to achieve black justice--a message unwelcome to his audience and presented earlier in the speech than most rhetoricians would advise. His apparent lack of audience adaptation was met with silence. Then he began the Americanisms ("equality, liberty, the pursuit of happiness") and brought his initially reluctant audience to their feet by intoning the names of Washington, Lincoln, and Jefferson. But Mandela had yet another twist to offer. He went on to speak of Americans whose names do not evoke an instant favorable reaction in Congress: John Brown, Marcus Garvey, W. E. B. DuBois, Sojourner Truth, and Frederick Douglass. His unusual organization and his surprise allusions notwithstanding, Mandela received a three-minute standing ovation at the end. Václav Havel, like Walesa, used the traditional kind of Americanisms throughout his speech: Lincoln, Jefferson, the Declaration of Independence, "the graves of American airmen and soldiers," and even the architecture of the U.S. House of Representatives. But his references reflect an independence of thought more similar to Mandela without the manipulativeness of Mandela's organization, and an intellectual appeal that surpasses the other two speeches. Havel's references to four American presidents was not name-dropping, but a substantive weaving of their ideas into his line of thought. His knowledge of Woodrow Wilson's contributions may have exceeded that of most

of his listeners. He eschewed the best known Lincoln phrases in favor of Lincoln's image of "the family of man."

Class discussion might focus on the following questions.

a. Which speech was probably most successful with the immediate audience and the wider television audience?

b. Which speech was most successful with the students themselves, who constitute part of the historical audience?

c. Is it necessary for a foreign speaker to use Americanisms in order to win a favorable response from American leaders and citizens? Can Americanisms be used in ways that are not superficial and ritualized? Can Americanisms be used in a way that increases an American audience's receptivity to more complex or controversial ideas?

Assignments to Improve Adaptation to Non-American Audiences

Americans are increasingly addressing non-Americans in professional, business, and political contexts. The messages of American media are received by people around the world. Many students now in American colleges will find themselves speaking to non-Americans in their future careers. The following assignments are intended to increase insight and allow experience which can be adapted to particular situations in the students' future.

1. Many allusions to people and places are culturally based and may not be familiar to a person from another country. If such a reference is missed or misunderstood by the listener, the consequence can be a communication breakdown. A serious instance occurred between Nikita Khrushchev and John F. Kennedy at their summit conference in Vienna in 1961. During a spirited exchange, Khrushchev said: "We will bury you." This phrase was picked up by

reporters and politicians and repeated for decades as proof of Soviet aggressive intentions and as justification for military increases of our own. Actually, Khrushchev was using an old Russian proverb meaning "we will outlast you," "we will still be here when you are gone," or "we will be here after you are buried." Properly understood, the words are still a challenge, but do not raise the specter of planned nuclear obliteration which was often attributed to them.

The class should listen to the audio-tape of Robert MacNeil's lecture entitled "The Made for TV World."[5] This was the inaugural Alistair Cooke lecture, delivered April 23, 1990, at The Royal Television Society's North American Center in New York. MacNeil is Canadian and his audience was primarily comprised of American and British listeners. During this lecture, MacNeil made many culturally specific allusions based on literature, history, and popular culture familiar and appropriate to his Anglo-American audience, but which might not be understood by a person from Asia, Africa, or Latin America. While listening, class members should list all of these references that they hear. Note that some of these allusions rely on MacNeil's voice inflections as much as his words. A partial list of his allusions follows and may be used for discussion in comparison to the students' lists after the tape is completed. (It may also be instructive to students when they miss allusions that the British portion of the audience would immediately recognize.)

Monty Python syndrome
lifestyles of the rich and famous
cannot deduce thy coming
waves Britannia still rules
a new Jerusalem
The battle for...is about to be over, the battle for...is about to begin; we shall fight it..., we shall fight it..., we shall never surrender.

Murdoch
Noel Coward
10 Downing Street
BBC
The Queen's own namesake
McCarthy days
King Kong
Hans Brinker
fast forward
Wheel of Fortune
by appointment to
industrial revolution
the medium is the message
far from the maddened crowd
Milton
Atlantic
read my lips
McNuggets
soap opera
to spank or not to spank
pursuit of happiness
I watch television, therefore I am free.
the winds of change

Further discussion could be based on Martin Luther King's allusions to The Gettysburg Address and black spirituals in his "I Have a Dream" speech. Discussion could also focus on allusions used by some speakers as intentional code words to a particular audience (e.g., F. W. de Klerk's use of "group rights" when speaking to white South Africans, Helmut Kohl's references to "the Fatherland" while speaking to East German audiences in the spring of 1990, and Yitzhak Shamir's meaning of "peace process."

2. After reading and analyzing Václav Hovel's speech (discussed earlier in this paper), each student should prepare an oral response--assuming that the audience is comprised of Czech diplomats and their families and the speech is to be given at the Czechoslovakian embassy in Washington, D.C., a day after Hovel's address to Congress. The content of the response should consist of acknowledgement and comment on Hovel's political and philosophical points of view. This response should include at least six references to Czech history

and culture, which emulate the depth and precision of Hovel's references. These references to Czech history and culture should serve in reverse the same purpose as Hovel's American allusions: to establish the credibility of the speaker as one who has understanding and respect for Czechoslovakia. The references should include mention of Tomas Masaryk, Eduard Benés, and Alexander Dubcek (recognizing an idea or contribution of each); and some recognition of the contributions of Czech immigrants to midwestern American culture (allusions might be made to Willa Cather's stories of Czech immigrants in Nebraska or Czech traditions in the speaker's home state). The goal is respectful adaptation which shows a depth of appreciation for the audience's culture.

Alternatively, students might be asked to respond to other foreign speakers who have addressed American audiences in recent years (e.g., Lech Walesa, Nelson Mandela, Corazon Aquino, Mikhail Gorbachev, or John Major).

Conclusion

The preceding assignments are intended to increase international awareness while pursuing traditional rhetorical considerations in the basic course. As the world becomes smaller, audiences become larger. Today's college students have seen others tear down walls and curtains which divided countries. Their task is to find the truthful, perceptive, respectful communication which will prevent new walls and curtains.

Notes

1. These assignments were developed with the support of a grant from the Office of Academic Affairs of the University of Northern Iowa.

2. The subscription address for World Press Review is 200 Madison Avenue, Suite 2104, New York, NY 10016 (212-889-5155).

3. "Question Time" and other videotapes about the British parliamentary system are available from Public Affairs Video Archives, Purdue University. West Lafayette, IN 47907 (1-800-423-9630).

4. Lech Walesa's address is in the Congressional Record-House, Vol. 135, No. 160 (November 15, 1989), H8632-H8635; Nelson Mandela's address is in the Congressional Record-House, Vol. 136, No. 83 (June 26, 1990), H4136-H4138; Vaclav Hovel's address is in the Congressional Record-House, Vol. 136, No. 13 (February 21, 1990), H392-H395.

5. An audio-cassette of "The Made for TV World," numbered K0980, is available from National Public Radio Cassettes, 2025 M Street, Washington, DC 20036.